DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 387 270 PS 023 669

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TITLE	Excitement in Eight Schools: Schools, Families, and Students Get Stronger When Parents and Teachers Take Collaboration into Their Own Hands.
INSTITUTION	Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning.; Johns Hopkins Univ., Baltimore, Md.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Sep 95
CONTRACT	R117Q00031
NOTE	15p.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Information Analyses (070)
JOURNAL CIT	Research and Development Report; n6 Sep 1995
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; Case Studies; Chinese Americans; Cooperative Planning; Cultural Influences; Early Childhood Education; Educational Attitudes; *Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; *Family School Relationship; *Integrated Services; Parent Attitudes; *Parent Participation; *Parent Teacher Cooperation; Poverty; Program Descriptions; *School Activities

ABSTRACT

This report reviews recent initiatives to improve family-school collaboration and communication. The six articles are: (1) "Schools, Families, and Students Get Stronger When Parents and Teachers Take Collaboration into Their Own Hands," which highlights parent-teacher action research projects at eight schools through eight case studies; (2) "Parent Perceptions and Beliefs about School-to-Home Communications Affect Their Involvement in Their Children's Learning," which presents the results of study of the school-to-home communications practices of 20 teachers; (3) "Poor Rural and Urban Communities Examine Social and Emotional Needs of Their Very Young Children," which summarizes a study of the concerns of parents about preschoolers' development; (4) "Improving Parent Participation in School-Based Programs," which describes an effective parent participation program; (5) "How Chinese-American Parents Support Their Children's Success in School," which summarizes a study on the educational attitudes of Chinese-born and American-born Chinese-American families; and (6) "Four Case Studies Examine Promising Integrated Programs That Empower Families." (MDM)

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ED 387 270

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT REPORT

CENTER ON FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS & CHILDREN'S LEARNING September 1995, No 6

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Excitement in Eight Schools

Schools, Families, and Students Get Stronger When Parents and Teachers Take Collaboration into Their Own Hands

In eight schools across the country, exciting stories are making the rounds—stories about how parents and teachers can actually work together as action researchers—and stories about the good things that can happen with schools, families, and children when they do.

Stories about changes in how school communities do business and make decisions. Stories about how people who are most affected by school decisions—parents—get a voice in making those decisions and get involved in carrying out those decisions. Most importantly, stories about how children in school are achieving better, behaving better, and feeling better about themselves as their families and their schools begin to work together and act on their common interest in the well-being and academic success of children.

These stories are recorded in the eight case studies these schools have written to describe their participation in the Parent-Teacher Action Research (PTAR) project conducted by the Institute for Responsive Education, Center on Families, and Boston University. Researchers Ameetha Palanki, Patricia Burch, and Don Davies present the case studies and draw implications for policy and practice in their report, "In Our Hands: A Multi-Site Parent-Teacher Action Research Project."

All the project schools have stories to tell about their parent-teacher action research projects—stories documented by research data gathered by and analyzed by the action teams.

Anwatin and Northeast Middle Schools are located in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Each school has an approximate enrollment of 800 students. Both schools created teams of parents and teachers called PATHS (Parents and Teachers Headed for Success), and both schools focused on improving home-school communication by installing answering machines and telephones in classrooms. They also established a parent-visitor/guest-lecturer program and a parent-worker program. Northeast Middle School also initiated an interactive homework program.

Stories at Anwatin and Northeast tell about successes in actually getting a lot of things up and running, including overcoming the technological glitches that seem to automatically come with homework hotline installations. The successfully installed hotline allows parents and students to call in to find out about homework assignments and upcoming events. It helped solve a common middle-school problem—giving parents one source they can turn to for information about what is happening in their child's classes and school.

Stories at Anwatin and Northeast relate how parents can get involved in middle-school activities. One parent noted: "I used to think that once the kid leaves elementary grades, parents are not welcome to observe classroom activities. . . . I hope more parents will be given the opportunity to experience this. . . ."

"Increased avenues of communication" may be the best title for the general story being told at Anwatin and Northeast. The case study writers note: "The greatest impact. . . at the two middle schools has been to increase the variety of avenues through which parents and teachers can communicate."

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Atenville Elementary school, in Harts, West Virginia in the foothills of Appalachia, has about 209 students enrolled. One goal of their parent-teacher action research project—Parents as Educational Partners—was to improve communication between families and the school. The school reached out to the least connected parents through a church-based parent center, a parent-to-parent phone chain, and home visits. The seven-member action research team examined effects of the program by compiling portfolios on children's progress and their family's involvement.

"In 1992, 72% of the school's students believed they would graduate from high school and go to college; in 1993, 86% believed; by 1994, 93% believed."

The stories going around Atenville tell about how an after-school tutoring program reached 21 students in the first year, 50 in the second year, and 62 in the third—and how the program, started by school personnel, is now directed and staffed by community members. How, in 1992, 72% of the school's students believed they would graduate from high school and go to college; in 1993, 86% believed; by 1994, 93% believed. How growing communication and trust between parents and teachers helped the number of families receiving Chapter 1 summer support services more than triple, from 12 to 38.

And how the County Board of Education planned to reconfigure Atenville, but changed its mind when it looked at the research data on parent involvement and support presented by the Parent-Teacher Action Research Team. The case study writeup notes: "Emotional and stressful decisions are never easy for any Board of Education, but they can be made less confrontational when action research teams are functioning and compiling data that will permit decisions to be made based on strong educational rationale rather than on emotional or political considerations."

A parent member of the Parent-Teacher Action Research Team observed, "I have watched our children, parents, and educators become better communicators, establish friendships, and become actual partners in the education of our children. . . . The program has now become such a part of our school and our lives that school without parents is incomprehensible."

Fairfield Court Elementary School in Richmond, Virginia is located between two low-income housing projects. Most children at the school come from single-parent families. Approximately 530 students (preschool–grade five) are enrolled in the school. Under a three-year grant from the Plan for Social Excellence, the school crafted a comprehensive child development program for children preschool through grade two. A team of home visitors (known as parent educators) visited parents bimonthly, worked with them on home-learning activities, connected them with community resources, and served as classroom tutors one day a week. The school gained parents' perspectives on the program's impact by having about 40 parents keep journals on their work with parent educators and its effects on their children.

The stories at Fairfield Court tell about parents of Fairfield children who are enrolling in GED programs and community colleges, and about how the parent educators—not without a struggle—are making home visits an accepted community occurrence. Parents are now keeping appointments a lot more faithfully and completing their home-learning activities more often.

There's a PTA story, too. The organization was "dormant" when the project started, but parents and teachers worked together to revive it. Now the PTA provides many needed services, for example, providing juice and fruit breaks to students during test-taking week. Parents are honored and respected with "parent of the month" photos hung in prominent places throughout the school.

Parents tell their own stories about what it is like to be involved with the school in a collaborative effort. One parent notes, "I enjoy watching the children in their day-to-day activities, seeing the way they improve, taking them places and watching as they face new experiences—the way they blossom with each new experience."

Ferguson-Florissant School District in Missouri has established a program called Boxes for Babes for families with infants age 10-24 months. The program is an offshoot of Missouri's Parents as Teachers program, a nationally recognized early childhood and parent education model. A team of parent educators conducted home visits to work with mothers on activity boxes which contain different toys and materials for parents to use with their children. The seven parent educators who were the action research team examined the effects the Boxes for Babes activity has on parents' interactions with their children.

The stories from Ferguson-Florissant are home-visit stories, the core of the district's efforts. Some are small stories about small steps taken—a teenage parent begins to write in her baby's "Baby Biography," a parent buys her baby a book or a toy similar to those contained in the activity boxes, a teenage parent who was previously noncommittal suddenly begins to encourage her own child's development by imitating her child's actions.

Some stories speak of larger accomplishments. "I'm more patient," one parent says; "I'm more knowledgeable of how important the little things are." Another parent says, "I spank less. I try different tactics. Now I pack up all the kids

and go to the Science Center, the zoo, or the park. Now I talk to them more, show them things, and ask them things."

Baby Biography stories are told. During each monthly home visit, parent educators wrote down parents' descriptions of their child's new strides in development and behavior. Parents kept each monthly description in a "baby biography" folder. As the parents related their reports in successive months, their negative descriptions decreased and their observation skills increased significantly, moving them toward becoming more effective parents.

The Samuel Gompers Fine Arts Option School serves approximately 547 children in fourth through eighth grade. Located in southside Chicago, the school introduced a male mentoring program in the fall of 1991. A core team of 14 mentors recruited from the community worked with students in and outside of classrooms. The goal of the program was to provide students with male and female role models to help students increase their self-esteem and academic success. The action research team helped mentors take a close look at the effectiveness of particular strategies, e.g., one-on-one tutoring, group work, and home visits.

Stories at Samuel Gompers revolve around the work of the mentors—how they learned to work effectively with young adolescent children, got to know parents, and actually made a difference in children's lives through such strategies as the "adopt-one save-one" program, which assigned an individual mentor to each individual eighth-grade student (and the student's parents) who was at risk of failing his or her grade.

But a larger vision emerged from the mentors' work, a vision that encompassed the entire school. "Our assumption was that increases in self-esteem and sense of self-worth would lead to improvements in learning," the case study writers note. But ". . .we have learned that children need much more than a high regard for themselves to do well at school. There are other conditions that have an important impact on children's learning."

Thus, the Parent-Teacher Action Research project at Gompers led to the identification of five categories of learning conditions that needed to be emphasized for the school's students—a sense of history, connectedness with others centered around learning experiences, a sense of uniqueness, the power to influence the circumstances of life, and models that help children establish meaningful values, goals, ideals, and personal standards. Emphasis on these categories has, in turn, led teachers to develop their own instructional approaches that are more fully grounded in the realities of students' lives and heritages, and that are more cooperative and experiential.

"Becoming active . . . has given me a sense of empowerment, a sense that my voice makes a difference, and also the sense of being an important part of a team."

The Patrick O'Hearn School is located in the racially and economically mixed neighborhood of Dorchester in Boston, Massachusetts. The school became a special education integration model school in 1989. Children with severe disabilities from preschoolers to grade four and regular education children learn together in the same classroom. The school's home visitor project is one part of a series of programs designed to build parent involvement at the school. The home visitor team—Family Outreachers as they are called—consists of parent volunteers who have received two full days of training and meet monthly to problem solve.

The story at O'Hearn tells how a small core of active family members reached out to other parents in the school community and achieved a significant result: families are now a major presence and force at the school.

One parent summarizes that story: "As I became involved with the visiting, I realized what a difference we made in the lives of the families we were reaching out to and how my involvement would impact my own family as well. I never before realized how much power I have in my children's education outside of the home."

Another parent says, "Becoming active. . . has given me a sense of empowerment, a sense that my voice makes a difference, and also the sense of being an important part of a team."

Now at O'Hearn, the family of every new child entering the school receives a home visit to welcome them and encourage their involvement. More than 90 percent of all families now meet with their child's teachers at least twice a year.

Stories at O'Hearn focus on students as well as parents, relating how "regular education" students at O'Hearn score at the 56th percentile in reading and at the 61st percentile in math on the Metropolitan Achievement Tests, compared to scores at the 42nd and 44th percentiles when the project began. Now, stories of individual students relate exciting progress—Allison misses 8 days of school in the year, not 22 or 72 days as in the previous two years; Lysa no longer withdraws in the face of new tasks or social situations, but instead participates fully in class and does well in all subject areas.

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Parent-Teacher Action Research
The Larger Meaning

Center researchers Palanki, Burch, and Davies note that the experiences and findings of these eight schools using the Parent-Teacher Action Research process suggest that "parent-teacher action research can be a useful way to involve diverse members of the school community in assessing school community needs, implementing strategies, and assessing the results of school improvement efforts."

In a preface, Davies discusses the benefits of parent-teacher action research as a tool for school and community renewal and a way to make school reform more responsive to the needs of children and families. He cautions, however, that the process is democratic—so "it can be an important and useful tool, but it also. . . can be very slow and cumbersome."

Summing across the work of the eight schools, Palanki and Burch note the following outcomes of the parent-teacher action research projects:

Schools have developed constructive two-way communication processes between families and school staff. Using journals, phone logs, answering machines and other channels, action research teams focused their efforts on making parent-teacher interactions more positive and establishing two-way conversations between parents and teachers.

Action research increased participation of teachers and parents in educational planning and assessment for individual students. Action research teams—using family portfolios and individual education plans and other more traditional assessments—increased and documented the participation of parents and teachers in making educational decisions focused on the needs of individual children.

Action research increased participation of teachers and parents in schoolwide educational decision making, curriculum development, and assessment. Action research teams collected data from a wide range of parents, teachers, students, and community members, providing more input into schoolwide decision making. The extensive data collected were used by the teams to inform decisions about designing portfolio assessments, setting priorities for school improvement plans, and modifying curriculum and parent/community involvement initiatives.

The Matthew Sherman Business and Government Preparatory School in San Diego, California serves more than 1,220 students, 85 percent of which are Spanish-speaking. Sherman's action research team coordinated the parent involvement program, which included home visitors (bilingual parents), teacher training workshops, a parent center, and the Organization of Latino Parents (OLP). This citywide Latino parent organization is an integral part of the school's reform efforts.

The case study writers sum up the effects of the parent-teacher action research project in general: teachers, parents, and the principal all agreed that parents were visiting classrooms more and feeling more at ease, children were more enthusiastic about school and schoolwork, parents were working more closely with their children at home, and children were doing and turning in more homework.

Specific Sherman stories relate how the parents conducting home visits were able to clear up misunderstandings between parents and teachers. For example, Mary's teacher said that Mary was not doing her homework. But Mary's mother knew she did her homework every night and packed it in her backpack to take to school. The problem was that the teacher did not have a place for students to turn in their homework, so Mary simply put it on her desk each day. The teacher created a special place for students to put their homework, and the problem was resolved.

In another example, home visitors related to Rocio's mother that Rocio did not participate in class discussion in school and didn't know her times tables. The mother explained that Rocio had just arrived from Mexico two months earlier (where she had lived with her grandparents) and was very shy and always stayed by herself. She did know her times tables, but her shyness prevented her from reciting them in class. So the teacher quizzed Rocio on the tables when they were alone and found that she did, indeed, know them.

■

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Parent Perceptions and Beliefs about School-to-Home Communications Affect Their Involvement in Their Children's Learning

Frequent and consistent school-to-home communications by teachers can increase parent involvement in their children's learning, but the mechanisms by which this happens are not totally straightforward. School-to-home communications also affect parents' perceptions and attitudes, students' perceptions, attitudes, and motivation, and perhaps even teachers' views of themselves as being effective in working with parents—and all of these variables may also contribute to increased parent involvement.

Effects of school-to-home communications both directly and through multiple other pathways are being investigated by Center researcher Carole Ames at Michigan State University, along with Lizanne de Stefano and Thomas Watkins at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Steven Sheldon at Michigan.

Ames and her colleagues note that many states and districts now make parent involvement a priority for school improvement plans, but not all forms of parent involvement contribute to the same outcomes.

Her research seeks to determine the outcomes produced by effective school-to-home communications and define the specific ways in which those outcomes are produced. Then we can make research-based decisions about the structure and delivery of school-to-home programs and practices.

In her study, Ames compares the effects of school-to-home communications practices of 10 teachers that parents have rated high in frequency and effectiveness of communications with 10 teachers that parents have rated low. She also uses path analyses to examine how parental beliefs and perceptions and parent involvement are related within three different educational groups: parents who attended or graduated from high school, parents who attended college, and parents who graduated from college.

Significant Findings

Comparisons and path analyses yield some significant findings:

Parents' level of involvement in their children's learning was higher when they received frequent and effective communications. Parents reported more involvement in their children's learning in the high-communicating-teachers group, and their children reported more involvement by their parents as well as better parent attitudes toward being involved. The path analyses also showed a direct relationship between the school-to-home communications received and the amount of parents' involvement.

Children's motivation to learn, attitudes toward parental involvement, and perceptions of their parents' level of involvement were more positive when their parents received frequent and effective communications.

Teachers who believed in their ability to involve parents (efficacy for parent involvement) initiated more communications with parents than did teachers who believed in their ability to teach well (efficacy for teaching).

However, teachers were significantly less confident about their ability to involve parents than about their teaching ability. Ames notes that helping teachers find successful ways of communicating with parents would be likely to increase their beliefs about their own efficacy for involving parents.

Parents who believed in their ability to influence their child's success (parents' sense of efficacy) reported greater involvement in their children's learning. This relationship was strongest for parents who had less formal education (high school or less). Also, the effect of school-to-home communications on parents' sense of efficacy was stronger for these parents than for more highly educated parents.

School-to-home communications had a significant impact on parents' overall evaluations of the teacher and their feelings of comfort with the school. "The lack of connectedness between the home and the school," Ames notes, "has been described by many as a major factor inhibiting partnerships." Thus parents' feelings of comfort, when considered for its long-term impact, may be an important outcome in itself.

Increasing Involvement of Less Educated Parents

Ames, in her path analyses, examined how three factors mediate the influence of teachers' school-to-home communications on parents' involvement in their children's learning. She found these three factors—parents' beliefs about their influence on their child, parents' perceptions of their child's motivation, and parents' perceived comfort with the school—were "effective in predicting involvement of the lowest educational group." Ames points out that this is noteworthy because "...increasing parent involvement among families in which parents have less formal education is the goal of many programs and interventions."

■

Poor Rural and Urban Communities Examine Social and Emotional Needs of Their Very Young Children

You're concerned about your two-year-old child's cognitive development and occasional moodiness and stubbornness. Where do you look for advice and support? Center researcher Colleen Morisset of the University of Washington found that parents in a study of two economically impoverished communities—one rural and one urban—looked first to their own and other parents in the neighborhood.

Morisset's study examined the developmental concerns that parents in these communities had about their children, the behavioral problems they saw, their preferred sources of advice and support, the learning experiences they provide for their young children, and ways they think their communities could help them prepare children for school. These questions were central to the study: What hazards to school readiness—and what positive factors—exist in poor rural and urban areas? How can these be overcome or expanded to better prepare children for entry into preschool and kindergarten?

The study used one-to-one interviews, focus groups, and surveys to collect information from two groups of participants—parents in the communities, and early childhood specialists and care providers working in the communities. A "most striking finding" in the focus groups, Morisset notes, "is the similarity in concerns of parents and providers." Basically, the concerns related to children's development of self-control, respect for others, and a sense of confidence and competence. No one in the focus groups, Morisset notes, mentioned "the lack of traditional pre-academic skills. . . as a concern."

Despite their demographic differences, the concerns of rural and urban focus group participants were also very similar. A major concern of both parents and child-care providers in both areas was the increasing numbers of infants and toddlers who they thought were unsupervised and essentially raising themselves in families lacking routines and schedules—families, they believed, who were living "harried, hurried, and inconsistent life-styles." Differences in rural and urban concerns were mostly a matter of degree, with a greater range of troublesome circumstances or more severe forms of risk conditions in the urban community.

"Parents. . . were most likely to look first to their own parents. . .as the preferred source of help with their infants and toddlers."

Survey information also revealed community similarities. In both communities, most concerns were about children's health and physical development (98% in rural, 85% in urban), followed by concerns about cognitive and emotional development (85% in rural, 82% in urban) and concerns about establishing family habits and routines (85% in rural, 77% in urban). About 20 percent of the parents surveyed in each community indicated that one or more of their concerns was "serious."

Where Do You Find Help?

As noted, parents in both communities were likely to look first to their own parents or other parents as the preferred source for help with their infants and toddlers. Fifty-three percent of parents in the rural community named their own and other parents as their number one source of advice and support; 77% of parents in the urban community did so. Health and social service professionals were named as the preferred source by 32% of rural parents and 18% of urban parents. Community family-center services (which were extensively available in both communities) were ranked first by only 10% of rural families and only 3% of urban families.

Morisset's study also asked parents in each community to indicate their preferred source for help according to specific concerns and problems. Some of these were recognized as being more appropriately handled by getting professional help—rural parents, for example, were three times more likely to refer concerns about problems with feeding, developmental ability, teething, and illness to health or social service professionals; urban parents were three times more likely to seek advice about problems with normal child development from health and social service professionals.

The overall strong dependence of parents on their own or other parents for advice and support still held, however, especially in the urban community. For example, for the top three behavioral problems identified by both rural and urban families (temper tantrums, moodiness, and stubbornness), more families preferred help from their parents or other parents (38% rural, 61% urban) than from health and social service professionals (23% rural, 14% urban) or from community family centers (24% rural, 9% urban).

Morisset also examined the concerns and problems of parents about their infants and toddlers according to five indicators of family risk level—annual income less than $9,000, four or more

children in the household, mother less than age 18 at first birth, mother with less than high school education, and only one adult in the household. The only differences found between low-risk and high-risk-level families were (1) low-risk parents were more likely to include self-help efforts as a resource for helping their children, and (2) low-risk parents reported more problems of all types with their children (probably because, given decreased levels of hardship, parents are more likely to identify and discuss disruptive behavior).

Paving the Road to Readiness: A Major Task for Parents

The rural and urban parents were also asked about what kinds of early learning activities they conducted in their homes and how community members could help them prepare their children to do well in school.

Significantly, Morisset says, more than two-thirds of the parents in both the rural and urban communities reported that "they felt they had enough time to provide quality learning experiences in the home." Their activities included reading, casual talking, playing or singing, and more formal teaching of verbal routines such as the child's name and address, prayers, and names of letters and colors. Toddlers' parents described a large number of skill-building activities.

Many parents wished they had more input from schools regarding how best to help their children prepare for academic success.

Another popular suggestion by parents for community help was the provision of peer play groups—areas in which mixed-age groups of children attending with their parents could engage in activities facilitated by knowledgeable adults. Parents also recommend parent education, home visiting programs, more information to increase their knowledge of existing programs, and building stronger relationships between home and school.

Morisset's findings point to several ways that communities can help pave the road to preschool and kindergarten readiness:

• *Other parents are the first source of advice and support.* Accurate and complete information needs to be provided throughout the community about infants' and toddlers' capabilities and early developmental milestones. Individual and community awareness of the existence of programs for young children and families must be enhanced, and the stigma attached to them reduced.

• *Parents select among other specialized sources of help and advice.* Parents turn to health and social services professionals and to community family centers for help with some concerns. These professional specialist sources might benefit from integration into a family-focused set of services, giving parents a single, reliable, one-stop information source.

• *Parents in poor rural and urban communities have time to provide learning experiences for their infants and toddlers.* But most are unsure about what activities are most appropriate to enhance their children's readiness for school. Parents can be advised through outreach efforts of educators and through media awareness campaigns on how to conduct appropriate activities such as teaching shapes, colors, body parts, and sharing, during family routines such as mealtimes, shopping, dressing, and bathing.

• *Parents want programs for their own education and programs for their children.* Morisset notes that play groups, reading programs, and recreation programs could also provide parenting programs. For example, community-based peer play groups could be designed to provide a safe place for children to play and learn social skills while providing skill-building opportunities for parents. ■

Improving Parent Participation in School-Based Programs:

Why Do Many Not Participate? Why Do Many Drop Out?

Some schools take great pains to create and publicize programs at the school—such as workshops and short courses—designed to provide parents with help in supporting their children academically or with help in managing their children's behavior more effectively.

All too often, though, not many parents show up to participate, and of those who do attend initially, many drop out before the workshop series is completed. Why do most parents not participate? Why do many who do participate drop out? What can schools do to get more parents to attend and complete these programs? These questions were addressed by Center researchers Larry Dolan and Barbara Haxby at Johns Hopkins University in a study that examines parent participation in school-based programs when the schools provide additional support services designed to counteract the reasons that many parents give for not participating. No transportation, the parents say. So the schools provided taxi service on request. Can't get a baby-sitter, the parents say. So the schools provided child care.

Don't understand what these programs are for, the parents say. So the schools provided a community outreach worker to conduct home visits to explain the programs and answer questions.

The programs offered to parents required attendance for eight weeks at one three-hour session per week. The first four weeks offered a Books and Breakfast program, in which parents and children receive breakfast and parents learn how to read more effectively with their children; the second four weeks offered a program of family discipline and behavior management.

The programs were offered to parents of first graders in two classrooms each

"Three of the reasons for non-participation . . . reflect parent beliefs that what the school is offering them may not be worthwhile."

in twelve urban elementary schools. Parents in six of the schools (the High Support Group) were provided with the programs and with extra support for participating—they got the transportation and the child care and the outreach worker. Parents in the other six schools (the Low Support Group) got the same Books and Breakfast and family discipline programs, but no extra support to help them attend.

Extra Support Results in Moderate Success

The extra support, the researchers note, produced "moderate success." In the High Support Group, 48% of the eligible parents attended at least one of the eight sessions; 37% attended all eight. In the Low Support Group, 38% attended at least one session; 27% attended all eight. Most importantly, the parents who made up the increased 10% of participants in the High Support Group were parents of children who were low achievers and whose home environments were less academically supportive—the parents who are generally more difficult to reach and less likely to participate in school-based programs.

Providing transportation and child care was clearly effective, the researchers note. None of the non-participants in the High Support Group cited transportation as a reason for not attending; only five percent cited child care. None of the dropouts from the sessions cited either transportation or child care as a reason for dropping out.

But their findings, the researchers note, can be interpreted either positively or not so positively. On the positive side, getting almost half the parents to participate is an accomplishment, as is the 10% increase in parents considered most difficult to reach. Think about getting these results for every school-based program this year and next year and the next, and you're talking about reaching a lot of parents.

On the not-so-positive side, however, "fewer than one-half the targeted parents attended even the first session of the intervention. . . even in the High Support Group." Also, the High Support Group produced only a slightly reduced dropout rate—23% of parents in the High Support Group dropped out before completing all eight sessions, while 29% in the Low Support Group did so.

Reasons for Dropping Out

Dropouts were interviewed to determine their reasons for leaving the programs. A major question—if the High Support condition eliminated child care and transportation as problems that caused dropout, why did almost as many High Support parents drop out as Low Support parents?

The answer, Dolan and Haxby note, is that dropping out was generally caused by "factors not within the control of the support mechanism—time constraints and personal problems." For these parents, problems arose that couldn't be easily anticipated and counteracted. Time constraints, other responsibilities, and personal problems accounted for 73% of the reasons for parents dropping out. In a focus group session prior to the study, parents noted this problem, saying that "many parents have too much stress in their lives and lack the social supports to get them to commit to eight weeks of any intervention."

Reasons for Not Participating

Reasons parents gave for not participating in either the High Support or Low Support conditions of the program brought to light a disquieting problem with parent participation in urban school programs. Three reasons for non-participation—program efficacy, distrust of the school, and program quality—reflect parent beliefs that what the school is offering them may not be worthwhile. Non-participation because of program efficacy means they don't believe the program will make any difference in their children's schooling. Distrust of the school means they're leery of school programs that purport to help them. Program quality means they don't believe the program itself is worth attending.

These three reasons for non-participation were cited by 57% of the High Support Group non-participants and by 71% of the Low Support Group non-participants. In the High Support Group, the use of a community worker to visit parents and discuss programs seemed to make only a slight difference in beliefs about program efficacy and quality.

"Somehow the negative baggage that is associated with programs for parents needs to be addressed," the researchers note. "We need to provide information meaningful to parents regarding program impact."

Once parents begin to participate, their concerns about efficacy and quality seem to be allayed. Parents who completed the program most commonly cited "the nonthreatening environment and the immediate application of strategies to help their children" as strengths of the two programs offered in this study. Also, in both the High and Low Support groups, few parents who dropped out reported the programs' efficacy or quality as the reason for dropping out.

Support Needs Unique to Each School

The researchers found that the schools which showed the lowest rates of parent participation, in both the High and Low Support conditions, had past histories of low parent involvement and low communication. This suggests that different schools may need to offer different degrees and types of support. Cost savings and improved rates of participation may occur if barriers to participation were assessed and used to design support mechanisms on a school-by-school basis. ■

How Chinese-American Parents Support Their Children's Success in School

In a study of 10 Chinese-American families with various socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, Center researcher Sau-Fong Siu at Wheelock College is examining how these families foster their children's success in school through personal, family, ethnic community, and mainstream community resources. A report on two of these families by Siu and her colleague Jay Feldman reveals differences and similarities between the beliefs and practices of a family classified as "Type I"—in which at least one parent was born in the United States and has gone through the American educational system—and a family classified as "Type II"—in which both parents are immigrants and did not attend school in this country.

The report looks at two successful students—"Julie Ho" and "Kenneth Lam." Both turned eight years old in September 1994, had the same kindergarten, first-, and second-grade teachers, and both are viewed as successful students by their teachers; their standardized test scores confirm that view.

Two Different Families

The Ho and Lam families, however, are quite different:

- Julie's father was born in the United States, graduated from an Ivy League school, and holds a high-paying, high-status professional position. Kenneth's father is an immigrant from China, graduated from high school, and is a waiter in a Chinese restaurant.

- Julie's mother was born and raised in the United States, has a college degree, and chooses not to be employed. Kenneth's mother has no degree and holds a clerical position.

- Julie's family lives in an upscale neighborhood noted for its expensive and elegant homes, and the family goes to a vacation home in a nearby state on weekends and during the summers. Kenneth's family used to live in a government-subsidized housing development in Chinatown, but now lives in their own condominium on the periphery of Chinatown.

- Kenneth's family income qualifies him for the Reduced-cost School Lunch Program. Julie does not qualify.

- For Julie's family, English is the primary language spoken at home. For Kenneth's family, Chinese is dominant in the home.

Thus, there are major demographic differences between these families. But both Julie and Kenneth are successful in school both socially and academically. Siu and Feldman examine the family beliefs and practices that contribute to the success of each.

Family Beliefs and Practices

Siu and Feldman compare and contrast the beliefs and practices of the Ho and Lam families in multiple areas and find similarities and differences:

What is Success?

Success to the Ho family means being happy, likeable, able to get along with others, and being financially self-sufficient through holding a professional job. To the Lams, success means "having your head sticking out above others," a Chinese idiom equivalent to the English word "outstanding"—this means graduating from college and holding a steady, respected professional job.

The families diverge in their views of what it will take for their children to succeed: Mr. and Mrs. Ho think Julie will do well if she "continues to be independent and to speak up in order to have her needs met," and "get[s] along well with others of different races." The Lams think Kenneth will succeed if he is able to be competitive— "to have an edge in competitive mainstream society." Thus, he must put his best effort into schoolwork, have experiences that will broaden his outlook, understand the strengths and weaknesses of each race, and "he must work harder than Whites."

What Is Parents' Role in Their Children's Education?

The Ho family's view of its role in enhancing Julie's school success is primarily to "be there" for her—to provide social and emotional support and some, but not extensive, guidance. The Lams' view of their parental role in enhancing Kenneth's school success is to keep him on the "proper path" to success. Mrs. Lam says, "As parents, our purpose is to guide him. . . through a path that might have a greater likelihood and more opportunity for success."

What Families Expect of Children

Both families expect their children to attend well-respected public middle and high schools (with private schools as backup options) and to graduate from college. They expect their children to have practical careers and become professionals. Although both Julie and Kenneth have exhibited some artistic talent, neither of their families wants them to become artists. Mr. Lam explains that ". . .there are many different career fields that are not practical. Neither drawing nor music is the path that we want to guide [Kenneth] through." And Mrs. Ho says that she will not encourage Julie to pursue a career in music or dance. She calls this her "Chinese decision," made on the basis of practicality.

Siu and Feldman also examine similarities and differences in each family's concepts of cultural identity, attention to their children's social and emotional development, their child-rearing practices, school involvement and parent assertiveness, and other beliefs and practices.

The researchers also delve into Julie's and Kenneth's motivations and their perceptions relating to education. Here they find a striking commonality: not only are both Julie and Kenneth very successful in school—which is why they were selected as part of the larger ethnographic study—but they also both have "extremely positive feelings about school. They do far more than tolerate school; they actually enjoy it."

Type I and Type II Differences

Siu and Feldman note that the Lams—both of whom are immigrants and did not attend school in this country—illustrate parental beliefs and practices common to Type II parents. Mr. Ho was born in the United States and both he and his wife attended school here—they illustrate beliefs and practices common to Type I parents.

Mr. and Mrs. Ho exemplify immigrants who have effectively negotiated two cultures, experiencing success in both their schooling and in their careers. They are secure in the sense that their children will be successful, and do not exhibit an emphasis on preschool academic preparation, close monitoring behavior, or protective stance toward their children. They focus more on the social and emotional development of their children. They see the value of their children having many interests and becoming well rounded, and are financially able to provide numerous opportunities for their children to have enriching experiences.

Mr. and Mrs. Lam exemplify immigrants who see themselves more as "outsiders looking in on mainstream society." There is little connection between their own life experiences and the experiences they want for their children. They attach great importance to having their children get good grades and succeed in school. The intense effort they place on keeping their children on the "correct path" to success becomes a driving force in their familial relationships.

Which family's approach to supporting their children's school success is the "better way?" Neither, of course. Siu and Feldman point out that there is more than one way to arrive at similar educational goals, and that "diversity exists even within the same ethnic group of parents."

This study demonstrates that "whatever the parents do makes sense to them, given their experiences and their perceptions of the larger forces in our society." This study of two families shows that "parents with less money, less formal education, and/or more environmental constraints can and do foster their children's success in school by making the most of personal, family, ethnic community, and mainstream community resources." ■

Four Case Studies Examine Promising Integrated Programs That Empower Families

Local projects that are developing collaboration among education, health, and other social service providers—and at the same time empowering families as equal partners in the effort—have a lot to tell us about both effective policies and effective practices.

Center researchers at Boston University and the Institute for Responsive Education—Patricia Burch and Ameetha Palanki, with principal investigator Don Davies—have conducted a two-year case study of each of four such projects. Davies notes, "The case studies depict efforts by local people in four very different situations to put into practice the concept that families, communities, and schools have a shared and overlapping responsibility for the healthy development and learning of children."

The four projects differ in their details but all are comprehensive—reflecting collaboration among multiple institutions that serve families, and seeing parents as partners, not just as clients. (For descriptions of the four projects, see the box on page 11.)

Based on the case studies, Burch and Palanki identify six components of these (and other) comprehensive initiatives that policy makers should address in any serious effort to create and facilitate effective collaborative projects.

The components, the researchers note, provide ways in which "families, schools, and communities—together with policy makers—can redefine their roles and institutional structures" to center on the needs of children and their families. The components are as follows:

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Editor ..... John H. Hollifield Associate Editor ..... Barbara S. Colton
Design and Layout ..... Lyndell D. Smith

This work was supported by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (R117Q00031). The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect policies of OERI or other funding agencies, and no official endorsements should be inferred.

Include the Family as Partner and Agenda Setter

The RAIN program in Dade County, Florida demonstrated how families can be involved at many levels in the development of collaborative initiatives.

They can and should be a lot more involved in activities where they're usually excluded—in assessing the needs and the strengths of their own community, in designing programs and making decisions about program components and processes, in implementing services, and even in evaluating program impact.

But to involve families in these ways, the researchers note, requires changes in many current policies. For example, some current policies set the pay of parents working in the schools at or near minimum wage, and classify their full-time work and efforts as half-time paraprofessional positions.

Set Up Effective Management and Administrative Structures

This doesn't mean hierarchy, bureaucracy, chain-of-command, top down or even bottom up. Effective structures in these collaborative projects set up ways to involve families and frontline workers together both formally and informally to meet regularly, exchange ideas and information, and work together on cross-role teams. New collaborative approaches, Burch and Palanki note, create turf issues that make collaboration among frontline workers and with families difficult.

They report that in many cases the new approaches ". . .ran counter to the ways in which people were used to working. Some felt threatened. Some school counselors felt that mental health counselors from a community agency were there to take their jobs. Community outreach workers felt that parents serving as home visitors were not necessary and duplicated their efforts. Teachers felt that parents were not competent to take on new roles and were sometimes there to spy on them."

Policies need to support management and administrative structures that address these issues across the various "turfs" and have the authority to deal with conflicts and misunderstandings, while also supporting good personal relationships and communication between frontline workers and families.

The Las Cruces, New Mexico project, for example, has developed a management structure that includes teams of representatives from parents, community organizations, service agencies, and schools, and the teams have the authority to cut through any one agency's red tape or financial limitations to make and implement decisions.

Use Multiple Sources of Funding

The funding for all four case-study projects required fishing in multiple streams—no one source was sufficient. Comprehensive initiatives require finding new sources of funds and recombining existing sources to use them more effectively. New Jersey's School-Based Youth Services, for example, taps local businesses and private foundations.

Various current policies can hinder these efforts to locate new funds and combine existing funds, for example, by requiring exclusive use of funds in targeted areas only.

Projects at a Glance

RAIN in Miami Beach

The RAIN (Referral and Information Network) program in Miami Beach, Florida, is housed in the Fienberg-Fisher Elementary School. One of the first American institutions encountered by immigrants from Central America, Haiti, and Cuba, Fienberg-Fisher serves approximately 1,200 students and their families from over 46 ethnic backgrounds (92% of whom qualify for public assistance).

In the RAIN room, parents plan home visits, make phone calls, and translate for new families who are uncomfortable asking for help from agencies because of their undocumented status and the stigma of having to ask for assistance.

Las Cruces, New Mexico

North of the Mexican border, a cross-section of administrators in Las Cruces, New Mexico are harnessing Federal, state and local resources to provide comprehensive services. Many of the children and families for whom services are intended are recent Mexican immigrants who lack health insurance.

The program is a partnership between the school district, the Housing Authority, the Early Childhood Program, the Mayor's Office and other agencies.

School-Based Youth Services

New Brunswick High School has 750 students in School-Based Youth Services; 45% are Latino or Spanish-speaking and 30% are African-American. School-Based is a partnership between the University of Medicine and Dentistry, New Brunswick Tomorrow (community development corporation), and the State Dept. of Education.

The partnership provides mental health counseling at the school, a school infant care center for teen parents, a health education and preventative program, employment services, and recreation.

Students help design and implement workshops and educational programs in anger management/conflict resolution, drug and alcohol abuse, and teen parenting.

The Parent Facilitation Project

In Snohomish County, Washington, this project trains parents to be partners and advocates for children's learning in their homes and schools as well as in the political arena. Part of Snohomish County's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, the project works with parents of limited income to develop decision-making skills which can help smooth a child's transition into public school.

Political realities also threaten funding, such as state cutbacks in New Jersey and budget deficits in Washington state where the Snohomish County program is located.

Create Cross-Agency and Cross-Role Networks To Gain Support

Linking social and health services to schools requires the support of the community to carry out activities that many communities do not initially perceive as being positive. Networks that include representatives not only of the collaborating organizations but also of community concerns can advocate for changes that might traditionally be resisted in some communities.

Such networks were formed in two of the four case-study sites. In the School-Based Youth Services Program in New Brunswick, New Jersey, a community advisory board worked with a community development corporation, city council, and groups that were resistant to opening a school-based day health center. Networking helped resolve the potential problems. In Snohomish County, the Inter-Agency Coordinating Council worked successfully with local agencies to resolve parent concerns by developing a new integrated service intake form that parents could use at clinics, welfare agencies, and schools.

Set Up Collaborative Evaluation Mechanisms

Integrated services programs are missing a good bet by excluding parents and staff from the evaluation process. Most current policies require external evaluations that "count" numbers of people served and the frequency and level of parent participation.

By themselves, these evaluations do not reflect an accurate picture of program impact on families, and they provide little information for improving or increasing impact.

Burch and Palanki point out that families and staff need to be involved in the design of evaluation, in the collecting and synthesis of data, and in the assessment of system-wide initiatives. Families and staff involved in ongoing evaluation can "monitor what is working, solve problems that are paramount or important to them, and make changes while the program is in progress rather than waiting until the end when families who were impacted are long gone."

Provide Training and Other Support To Involve Families

Providing training and support is essential to empower families as equal partners, and this empowerment is an essential component of comprehensive initiatives.

Family empowerment requires that family members be trained to function in new roles. And they must be supported in receiving that training and in carrying out their new roles, which means providing child care, transportation, and other amenities that allow them to participate fully.

As families become fully empowered, they can in turn become trainers for other families and for staff. Snohomish County's Parents-as-Facilitators project builds continuity and institutionalizes parent involvement by having parents train other parents.

In some case-study sites, training of family members has taken place in conjunction with other program people—educators, care-givers, program directors. Inclusive training helps empower families and also builds shared ownership of the program by the collaborators, thereby helping to defuse turf issues.

Research & Policy Future Directions

Burch and Palanki cite several questions that need to be answered through further research. These mainly pertain to hammering out the details of how families can truly be empowered to participate in comprehensive initiatives. What salary structures and job classification schemes will help families be recognized for the value of their contributions? What kinds of training and support do program staff need to collaborate effectively with empowered families? How can families and other staff become more fully and permanently involved in evaluating programs?

The primary policy issue is clear. Coordinated Federal, state, and local policies need to be developed—through dialogue, based on research, between practitioners and policymakers—that empower families as part of collaborative strategies to deliver comprehensive services. Unless this occurs, say the researchers, "school-linked service integration initiatives run the risk of creating programs that are unresponsive to the needs and strengths of the families and communities they intend to serve." ■

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CFC31	*Success in School: The Journey of Two Chinese-American Families* -Sau-Fong Siu and Jay Feldman; in press.		

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P-6-09-L6	TIPS Language Arts Prototype Activities (Grade 6)		8.00
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P-8-4	*High School and Family Partnerships—Surveys and Summaries: Questionnaires for Teachers, Parents, and Students in HIGH SCHOOL, and How to Summarize Your High School's Survey Data.* Joyce L. Epstein, Lori J. Connors, and Karen Clark Salinas, 1993.		8.00

NOTE: Prototype Activities for TIPS Language Arts and Science/Health contain about 40 examples each and TIPS Math, 20 examples. These activities require the Manual for Teachers, P-6-08. TIPS Math and Science Manual and activities are available for the elementary grades on request.

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